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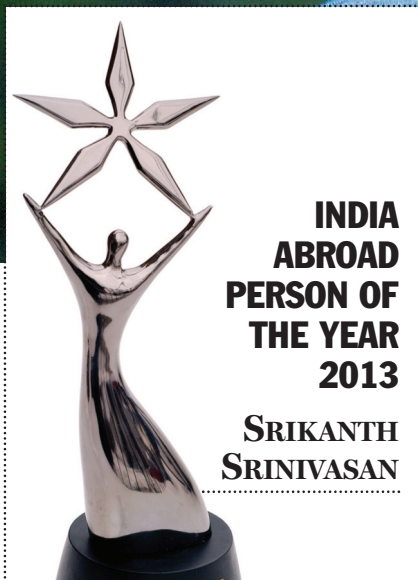
INDIA ABROAD PERSON OF THE YEAR 2013

Presented by

WELLS
FARGO



PARESH GANDHI



THE JUDGE



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COURTESY: THE SRINIVASANS

Sri Srinivasan took his oath of office as a US Circuit Judge of the US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, with his mother, Saroja Srinivasan, holding the Gita.

He personifies the best of America

Aziz Haniffa salutes Srikanth Srinivasan, the India Abroad Person of the Year 2013

When *India Abroad* editors began brainstorming to select the awardees for the 2013 India Abroad Person of the Year slate of awards, the jury was never out when it came to reaching a unanimous decision on our choice for the India Abroad Person of the Year Award 2013.

The decision was the mother of all no-brainers — Judge Srikanth 'Sri' Srinivasan, the first South Asian American in this community's immigrant experience who was unanimously confirmed by the United States Senate by a vote of 97-0 and then sworn in by retired Supreme Court Justice Sandra O'Connor as a federal judge on the US Court of Appeals in the District of Columbia, the nation's second highest court.

Sri, as he is popularly known, was nominated by President Barack Obama June 11, 2012, nearly 10 months after the President appointed him Principal Deputy Solicitor General, replacing yet another trailblazing Indian American, Neal Kumar Katyal.

In nominating Sri, President Obama said, 'Sri is a trailblazer who personifies the best of America,' and noted that 'Sri spent nearly two decades as an extraordinary litigator before serving as Principal Deputy Solicitor General of the United States.'

'Now,' Obama predicted, 'he will serve with distinction on the federal bench,' and pointed out, 'Sri will in fact be the first South Asian American to serve as a circuit court judge in our history.'

Urging swift Senate confirmation at the time, the President exhorted, 'It's important to remember that this confirmation is the first one to this important court in seven years.'

At the time, *India Abroad* on the mere strength of this unprecedented and historic nomination of an Indian American tapped Sri to accept the India Abroad 2012 Publisher's Award for Excellence. But since his nomination was pending, with the conservative Republicans in the US Senate holding up all of the President's judicial nominations, he couldn't accept the honor at the time.

After he was confirmed by the Senate, and sworn in September 26, 2013, we were elated when we informed him of our decision in October 2013 and he told *India Abroad*, "I'm



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exceedingly humbled to be recognized by *India Abroad* for 2013 and for the distinct honor.”

Then manifesting his quintessential humility, not to mention his signature self-deprecating sense of humor, and never giving an inkling of any presumptiveness, the judge told this correspondent, “Since the year is not yet over, you have inherent latitude to alter course in the event that either someone else emerges or present company submerges.”

Reiterating his gratitude for selecting him — when we were more humbled than he was that he had accepted the Award — he added, “I’ve been so blessed in so many respects this year — and long before — and it has been wonderful for me and my family in a year that’s had its fair share of challenges for us, and glad you’ve been able to share in much of it.”

Perhaps it can be argued that Sri was on the cusp of greatness when he was a starting point guard for the Lawrence, Kansas, high school basketball team, leading his team to a state championship, though he never made it to the NBA.

There is no denying that he catapulted into greatness when he created history by being the first Indian American to argue before the Supreme Court in November 2002 when he was an Assistant to the Solicitor General.

It was a case about circumstances in which it is Constitutionally permissible to impose a capital sentence against a person in a retrial when the person has received a life sentence — rather than a capital sentence — in the initial trial.

Sri argued, on behalf of the United States, that it was permissible to impose a capital sentence in the retrial.

When he was in private practice, working for O’Melveny & Myer, Sri also represented individuals arguing against a capital sentence on a pro-bono basis.

This versatility clearly were early indications that he had all of the wherewithal to be a judge — a fair judge — something that jumped out at members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, particularly conservative Republicans, who grilled him aggressively and threw every curve ball they could at him vis-à-vis his judicial temperament.

When he was appointed Deputy Principal Solicitor General in 2011, Solicitor General Don Verrilli said, ‘He is one of the country’s leading advocates before the Supreme Court, and will bring to his new position both a deep knowledge of the Supreme Court and of the office and its responsibilities and traditions,’ and predicted that ‘he will be an invaluable asset to the Department of Justice and to the work we do to protect and defend the interests of the American people.’

Since 2007, Sri had been a partner in O’Melveny and Myers LLP in Washington, DC, chairing the firm’s appellate and Supreme Court practice. At O’Melveny and Myers, he argued multiple cases before the US Supreme Court spanning multiple topics, including criminal law and procedure, immigration law, banking law, education law, administrative law and federal contracting law.

From 2002 to 2007, Sri served as assistant to the US Solicitor



Sri Srinivasan, standing next to Walter Dellinger, left, at the time of his first Supreme Court argument in 2002. After winning that first case he argued 25 cases before the Court, including representing the United States in opposing the Defense of Marriage Act.

COURTESY: THE SRINIVASANS

He personifies the best of America

General and earlier from 1998 to 2002 did his first stint at O’Melveny and Myers. Prior to that, he served as a law clerk for US Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor — in the 1997-1998 term — and for Judge J Harvie Wilkinson III of the US Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit.

Sri was also a lecturer at the Harvard Law School, where he taught a course on Supreme Court and appellate advocacy and received many awards and recognitions, including being named among *The National Law Journal’s* 50 Most Influential Minority Lawyers in America in 2008.

An alumnus of Stanford University from where he received his bachelor’s degree, Sri went on to receive his JD from the Stanford Law School, and an MBA from the Stanford Business School.

At the time Walter Dellinger, who was a colleague of Sri’s at O’Melveny, a former US Solicitor General and one of Sri’s closest friends, told *India Abroad*, “From the time Sri and I first worked together in the Solicitor General’s office in 1996, I have thought that he would become one of the best advocates and finest lawyers of his generation.”

Dellinger, under whom Sri served when he won the coveted year-long Bristow Fellowship in the US Solicitor General’s office and who had spoken to *India Abroad* several years ago when Sri argued his first case before the Supreme Court, when contacted to comment on his latest position, said, “Didn’t I predict great things for Sri, and I was right wasn’t I?”

“This,” he told *India Abroad*, “is a very exciting development for Sri,” who had by then argued a total of 17 cases before the US Supreme Court, and reiterated, “He is clearly one of the most gifted lawyers of his generation.”

“Sri,” Dellinger recalled, “was on a one-year fellowship in the Solicitor General’s office during the term that I spent as Solicitor General and I thought I saw at that time he had the makings of a truly great lawyer and I must say, I am not surprised at how successful he’s been.”

On May 16, 2013, the US Senate Judiciary Committee unanimously approved Srikanth



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HONOR ROLL

INDIA ABROAD PERSON OF THE YEAR

SWATI DANDEKAR (2002)
Then Iowa Congresswoman

SONAL SHAH (2003)
Co-founder, Indicorps

MOHINI BHARDWAJ (2004)
Captain, US Olympics Gymnastic Team &
Olympic Silver Medalist

BOBBY JINDAL (2005)
Then United States Congressman

INDRA NOOYI (2006)
Chairman and CEO, PepsiCo

MIRA NAIR (2007)
Filmmaker

FAREED ZAKARIA (2008)
Then Editor, Newsweek International &
host, Fareed Zakaria GPS

VENKATRAMAN RAMAKRISHNAN (2009)
Nobel Laureate

NIKKI HALEY (2010)
Governor, South Carolina

PREET BHARARA (2011)
US Attorney for the Southern District of New
York

AMI BERA (2012)
US Congressman
RAJ SHAH (2012)
USAID Administrator

Judge Srikanth Srinivasan
For being the nation’s first
Circuit Court Judge of South
Asian descent; for personifying
the best of America and
of India; for making history.

He personifies the best of America

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Srinivasan's nomination as judge on the US Court of Appeals, and sent it to the full Senate for a vote.

Sri received the nod from all 18 Senators on the Judiciary Committee, including the ranking Republican on the panel, Senator Charles Grassley of Iowa, who had subjected him to some tough grilling when he appeared before the committee on April 10, 2013.

Hardly a week later came the slam dunk — the full Senate by a vote of 97-0 confirming Sri's nomination and even before he could take his seat on the bench, the buzz among legal analysts, bloggers and colleagues got even louder in that he could be President Obama's first choice for a Supreme Court nominee whenever a vacancy opens up.

In praising the Senate's unanimous confirmation, the President said, 'Sri is a trailblazer who personifies the best of America. Born in Chandigarh, India, and raised in Lawrence, Kansas, Sri spent nearly two decades as an extraordinary litigator before serving as Principal Deputy Solicitor General of the United States.'

'Now he will serve with distinction on the federal bench. Sri will in fact be the first South Asian American to serve as a circuit court judge in our history,' he said.

Senator Mark Warner, Virginia Democrat, and one of Sri's most ardent supporters, pointed out that 'the enthusiastic bipartisan support he has received reflects his effective work for both Democratic and Republican administrations and numerous well respected judges.'

'His approval also has great significance for the Indian-American community, which despite an incredibly rich talent pool in the legal arena is under-represented at the highest levels of our legal system,' he said, and predicted, 'Sri Srinivasan is poised to change that as he continues his exceptional career.'

And, then came Sri's big day September 26, 2013, when exactly at 5 pm, with his right hand placed on the Bhagavad Gita held by his mother Saroja Srinivasan, he was sworn in — by Justice Sandra Day O'Connor — as the newest federal judge on the US Court of Appeals in a packed ceremonial courtroom at the E Barrett Prettyman US Courthouse.

Over 500 guests attended the swearing-in ceremony, including scores of legal luminaries, senior Obama administration officials and friends and family of Sri, including then Indian Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh's wife Gursharan Kaur, so much so that an overflow room had to be opened, obviously a testament to the great respect, admiration and Sri's popularity.

Among several luminaries who showered kudos on Sri at



Sri Srinivasan takes his seat as judge.

COURTESY: THE SRINIVASANS

this investiture, Dellinger, one of his earliest bosses who went on to become one of his closest friends, predicted, as a judge, Sri would 'engage in conversation with the advocates, conversations in which he will always be open to persuasion by coach of argument.'

'As a practicing lawyer,' he noted, 'Sri had opposing counsel, but he never had opponents, and I think that's because he understood that all of us who engage in the processes of law are joint collaborators in a mutual enterprise.'

Dellinger recalled Sri's passion, talking about how when he returned to O'Melveny & Myers after his stint as an assistant to the Solicitor General, 'what he asked of the firm was a commitment that he could engage in an unusually expansive pro bono practice and, indeed, he did. He argued cases for immigrants, for indigent criminal defendants, for Latino students seeking equal access to educational opportunity and many others — and he did so with intensity and commitment.'

He also told the audience, 'If you want to know what kind of person this new judge is, there's a simple way — take a stroll with Sri to any of the buildings in which he's ever worked. If you walk with him into the courthouse where he clerked or the Department of Justice or the halls of his law firm, watch the reaction of his former colleagues, including those who guard the doors and answer the phone, serve the food and clean the building.'

'They light up when Sri appears,' Dellinger said, 'and what does that tell you?'

'I do believe this — that somehow it has to matter that a judge is a really deeply decent human being, literally and figuratively,' and he added, 'Sri has come a long way since he was born 46 years ago in Chandigarh, India, and given by his father and mother the name Padmanabhan Srikanth Srinivasan.'

'When the future histories of this court are composed,' Dellinger predicted, 'I'm confident that an important part of that ongoing narrative will be the contributions of its newest member, Judge Srikanth Srinivasan.'

Chief Judge Merrick B Garland, who presided over the

entire ceremony, then called on 'the stars of the show,' Sri's 11-year-old twins Maya and Vikram, to assist in the wrapping of the robe on their dad to sustained applause that went on for several minutes.

In his initial remarks, Sri provided a taste of his signature humor, saying he was humbled by the 'honored and distinguished guests and some of my somewhat less honorable friends from my earlier years,' but as the peals of laughter subsided, thanked them all profusely for attending the ceremony.

He extended his 'sincere and heartfelt gratitude and thanks,' to all his mentors, and declared, 'The overriding sensation that I feel today in a sense is of how incredibly fortunate I've been so far — and I can't emphasize that more,' and getting emotional, said, 'My sisters Srija and Srinija, I have relied on your love from an early age and it has sustained me throughout.'

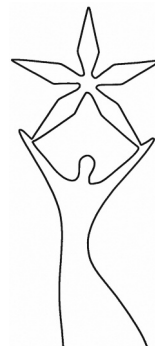
And turning to his kids, said, 'Maya and Vikram, you two give me more love and inspiration than any parent can rightfully expect from a child.'

'To my mom, you've been with all of us at every meaningful step of the way, so it's especially fitting that you were able to stand with me today to assist me in taking this oath of office.'

He told the sizable number of second generation Indian-American guests on hand to witness this historic swearing-in that 'I am touched by your efforts and I am humbled by your confidence.'

Then turning to the then Indian prime minister's wife who was seated in the first row, with her two daughters, next to Saroja Srinivasan, the newly minted judge said, 'Mrs Gursharan Kaur, the honorable First Lady, what a terrific thing that you were able to be here with us today — essentially fresh off the plane from India.'

'That means especially much to us given my late father's most recent passing and the



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At the center of his universe

Sri Srinivasan's adorable twins, Vikram and Maya, in a candid chat about their father with **Aziz Haniffa**

No wonder that his twins Vikram and Maya, 12, are the center of Judge Sri Srinivasan's universe. They are remarkable kids — poised, confident and articulate. Although Sri would tell me later how nervous they were before the interview there was not a whiff of that during our interaction.

Sri, who did not want to be in on the interaction so that his kids could be as free and candid as they wanted, was asked by his kids to stay in the room and with each answer they gave, he simply swelled with pride.

Despite their candor in holding nothing back in terms of their dad's idiosyncrasies, his love for clothes and shoes, it was evident that they loved him no end and reciprocated his love and kindness and respected the discipline he brought to their lives.

Is he a fun guy?

Vikram: He is a very fun guy. He always likes to have fun with us, especially in sports. He likes to play basketball with us and watch sports.

Maya: I think my dad is a very fun guy outside of work because I know his serious side and I know his fun side. And when he is with us he always likes to make jokes, and he loves to go outside and play basketball with us and play catch with us.

Does he also discipline you when you do something that he doesn't like?

Vikram: He definitely disciplines us to the extent that we're great kids, but he definitely does not cross the line of being a very over protective parent.

But you guys know where the red line is?

Vikram and Maya: Yes

Maya: Yes, we know that when we argue about small things, we just start bickering or yelling at each other and he does not like yelling; that can cross the line.

When you guys fight and you have a problem with each other, do you go to him to settle the dispute?

Maya: Sometimes. Lots of times it's hard for us to settle it by ourselves. It's hard for one of us to let it go; we both always have to have the last word.

Vikram: If it's a minor thing, if it's a minor argument we can usually settle it by ourselves, but whenever dad's upstairs changing and we are down here watching the television or something and then we start having a fight over something as small as the remote and he starts hearing yelling, he'll come down and he'll stop us before it gets too bad.

If you have, let's say a major dispute, is he fair when he settles it? Does he listen to both sides? Is he a good judge?

Maya: Usually, he doesn't like to hear us talk about it. He usually just likes to tell us to stop and that's that.

He is fair. He is fair.



Sri Srinivasan, the adoring father with his babies Vikram, left, and Maya, right.

COURTESY: THE SRINIVASANS

And you all are generally satisfied with the verdict?

Maya: Yeah.

Vikram: I am generally not satisfied with the verdicts, and I am not really sure why, but you know that's just us. He definitely does it fair, as fair as he can, you know.

When we are fighting it'll never end up good for one of us, you know. He always has to punish both of us.

Do you know that he is a pretty big time judge? Do you know it's a pretty big deal?

Maya: Yes, I know it's a big deal. I definitely know it's a very big deal. Me personally I am not the type to just go out there and be that person with my dad. My brother maybe likes the attention a little bit more. I don't know about me.

When did you guys know? Was it at the investiture ceremony?

Vikram: For me actually... (*it was when*) we went to a party at the White House (*at the Asian Pacific American Heritage Month celebration last year*) that was when we got to meet the President. That was sort of when I realized that he was a big deal, especially at that party...

There were two rooms: One was the talking room; the other room was where you got to eat. Me and my sister we enjoy to eat, so we were trying to make our way from the conversation room to where you can eat, and it was very hard to make our way because every moment, every two seconds, somebody would walk up and say, 'Hey Judge! Judge Srinivasan! Can we take a picture with you?'

Maya: Everyone loved to take a picture with him. Everyone would start pulling him aside, say, 'Hey Judge!'

Hey Judge! Let's take a picture!' And we never have our chance to talk to him. We realized it's a big deal.

Did you watch him argue in the Supreme Court?

Maya: Yes, we did. We did watch him argue a few times. I have to say it's amazing to see him get up there and argue in front of all these judges while they interrupt you and tell you and ask you questions. It will be hard for me to handle something like that.

It was very hard to understand. It was tiring and I have to say it was a little bit boring, but it was (*also*) amazing!

Were you guys impressed?

Vikram: I had seen him argue in the Supreme Court and I was definitely impressed with him because I know that's a pretty big deal.

But at the same time every single time I saw him argue in the Supreme Court, after maybe five or 10 minutes or so I would find myself staring at the clock, watching the seconds go by, very bored, just waiting for it to end...

Especially because of the words in the vocabulary that they are saying, I just don't understand it with like 20-letter words.

Is he sort of feisty? Is he sort of pretty cool, but makes his point?

Maya: He is cool. He doesn't raise his voice. I would be the one, if I was out there, I would be the one getting mad at the judges saying stuff and I would just wanna go through it and not have inter-



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At the center of his universe

ruptions, but he is cool about it.

He is very cool about it.

Vikram: Yes, especially you know every single time he would argue before the Supreme Court — it was very tough for me and Maya — the week or two beforehand he was up until four in the morning just studying.

That definitely helped a lot for him being cool, so he could hear the judges and he would always have a good answer for.

What are some of the things he is really hopeless at?

Maya and Vikram: (*Thinking hard*)

How about cooking? Is he a great cook?

Maya: No.

Vikram: No, that's one thing.

Maya: We love to go out for dinner with my dad. I cannot remember the last home-made meal we had with my dad. He likes to warm things up in the microwave or get things in the freezer aisle at the grocery store, but it's very rare that we ever have a home meal.

So he is really hopeless when it comes to cooking?

Vikram: It's very surprising that he is that hopeless at cooking because our grandma, his mom, is such an amazing cook.

I was going to ask you whether he can make any kind of Indian food because your grandma must be making Idli, Sambar, Vada all that. She must be fabulous.

Maya: Whenever we go to California to visit her and we get off the plane she always has a nice Indian meal waiting for us at her house.

Vikram: Yeah, she has basically for us a Thanksgiving feast of Indian food at her house waiting for us.

It's just surprising how great a cook she is and how bad a cook my dad is.

I know sometimes it's nice to go out, but sometimes it can be a pain also because you want to unwind, just decompress at home, but dad can't cook so you've got to go out...

Vikram: Definitely... I always want to watch a basketball game so sometimes it's a little tough to *stop* watching some of the basketball games on Sunday night or Saturday night to go out to eat.

Maya: We always argue about where one goes. It takes 10 minutes before we finally come to a decision about where we eat.

Is he very particular about what you eat?

Maya: No.

Vikram: He is kind of strict about it. He doesn't wanna come to a McDonald's every day or something. But at the same time we go out to a restaurant and we see the parent right next to us making sure that the kid gets water and he gets a salad. But my dad isn't like that; he let us have some unhealthy food.

Maya: We also like to go out to dessert a lot.

Is he a fast food junkie?

Maya: He is not, but with us he is pretty calm about what we choose, what we get.

So what are the things he does really well and what do you really enjoy doing with him?

Vikram: Basketball! Basketball!

Shooting hoops outside or going to the nearby open gym every once in a while.

Maya: We like to go outside in the backyard to play catch, and that's always fun.

Me and my dad have a special bond with ice skating. We



PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY: THE SRINIVASANS

have a nice duet that whenever we go ice skating we always like to perform.

I go through his legs, then he lifts me up and throws me round...

You guys are good at that?

Maya: It's almost a joke. We fall down a lot....

So if he was not a judge there is no way he could have joined Ice Capades?

Vikram and Maya: No!

Vikram: I am really bad at ice skating, so I go on the ice and I grab onto the wall. And I watch my dad try to go on the ice and dance with my sister.

I am always worried that one of his blades will hit her face because he is such a bad ice skater.

Why does he try to do it? Because he wants to be with you guys?

Vikram and Maya: Yes.

What do you sort of hate doing, but you have to do with dad?

Vikram: For me (*the thing*) he makes me do a lot that I don't love doing is definitely chores, like helping with the laundry, or doing the dishes.

Does he entertain a lot?

Maya: We go over to his friends' houses a lot and occasionally we have friends come over here.



Sri Srinivasan's kids love the fact that he carried their baby socks in his pockets every time he argued before the Supreme Court.

Vikram: See, my dad, he doesn't actually have that many friends...

Maya: Outside of work.

Vikram: Yes, outside of work.

Maya: He has lots of friends, just not here in Virginia outside of work.

Vikram: He does not have a great amount of friends, so we end up seeing you know the same friends a lot...

He'll say we are gonna have a dinner party Friday night. We're gonna go over and see friends, and we are like which one is it — this one, this one, or that one?

Is he a kind, affectionate and caring kind of a person? Does he hug you guys all the time?

Vikram: Yes!

Maya: *Very* affectionate... Sometimes when I have not seen him for the whole day and if I don't give him a hug and a kiss right away he will act very sad and very mad.

Vikram: Sometimes we'll be hugging for a while. I'll have to get him off me because I have to go do something else.

Does he drop you off at school or pick you all up?

Maya: Yeah. He drops us off at school a lot in the mornings.

What are his habits that are strange and



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At the center of his universe

weird? Give me a whole list.

Maya: He loves ties. He always buys new ties *and* clothes *and* shoes. It's very hard for him to resist buying new clothes.

And every night when I think he is doing work and I'll be going to sleep he is really looking for clothes, which he just adds to his cart. I am not sure he buys them.

Maya: He loves outlet malls.

Vikram: Some other habits he has is that every single night before we go to bed he'll sing a song with us to help us go to bed, even at this age.

Also one of my favorite habits is that whenever he argues or argued in front of the Supreme Court he would put one of our baby socks — one of mine and one of her baby sock — in his pockets.

I am not sure if he does it now when he has to sit in, but that meant a lot to me.

Maya: Yeah.

Even at the inauguration he pulled out those socks from his robes. Does he wash them ever so often?

Maya: I don't think he washes them...

Vikram: He only has one sock from each of us, he doesn't change it...

I have heard this thing about his clothes. Tell me a little more.

Maya: It's ties, it's suits, it's shoes definitely ...

Vikram: Yeah... Once I was looking because he loves shoes and so do I — I am a big fan of sneakers — but he loves his shoes so once I was counting all the pairs of shoes he has in his closet. I think probably there are three giant cabinets full of shoes...

Maya: He likes to know that he looks good. He likes to know that his hair is always good because I'll come up to him and try to touch his hair.

No, no, I can't do that. I know I can't do that, but I do it to bug him.

Vikram: He also loves his ties. We'll go into his closet every once in a while and we will pick out our five favorite ties of him. He really likes his ties.

Tell me about how crazy he is about basketball. I remember your aunts telling me at the inauguration how he screams and shouts when he is watching it on TV and his team is losing or they miss or something.

Vikram: It's really crazy. He likes to play it a lot, but now he is getting to the age where his legs are hurting a lot and he can't play, which I know hurts him a lot because he really wants to play. That's definitely rubbed off on us.

Kansas basketball is our favorite team. And watching Kansas basketball, we'll be yelling at the guy — and the thing is we'll call Kansas 'we' instead of 'them' because we're such big fans — and he'll say a lot of stuff.

Maya: It gets very intense. I used to go to a different room...

Vikram: I have heard the story, I don't remember it. But when we were like one year olds or two years olds, we were going to bed — me and Maya — and my dad was watching a Kansas basketball game and he said a bad word and my sister was like, 'Oh, oh! Basketball.'

But does he say I may have used some of these words but you guys are never to use them? Or it's just the heat of the



The Srinivasans have a shared love for sports, especially basketball.

COURTESY: THE SRINIVASANS

moment and doesn't even realize sometimes?

Maya: I'll start yelling at him. I'll start saying, 'Dad! Dad! Don't say that. Don't say that please! It's not good. It's not good for us. It's gonna rub off on us' and then he says, 'Maya, Maya, stop! Maya, Maya, watch!'

Vikram: But the good thing about him saying some bad words is whenever I'll say a bad word around the house I'll always have a perfect excuse. I say, 'Hey, you said it when we were watching the game the other day, so I think I am allowed to say it now.'

You guys love basketball too...

Maya: I think basketball is a great sport. I *love* basketball. All my friends play soccer, every single one of them love soccer, but soccer is not my thing. Basketball is a great sport, and watching basketball and playing basketball is really fun.

Vikram: Yeah.

Is it fair to say that since your dad was a basketball player, you watched basketball, and you guys were hanging out with him and watching basketball — that probably led to you loving the sport?

Maya: He is the one that pushed me into playing competitive basketball the first year, but now that's all I do and that's what I love.

Vikram: I've heard my mom say that we didn't love basketball at a young age. My favorite sport definitely used to be baseball, but now I like basketball a lot more and ended up not playing baseball anymore just to focus on basketball because it's such an amazing sport.

Basketball has kind of made my life the way it is.

What grade are you guys in?

Vikram and Maya: Sixth.

Maya: It's middle school.

Do you play for your school team?

Maya: It's hard for sixth graders to make the team. It's very hard. It's mostly seventh and eighth graders, but I made my team this year and a few other sixth graders made it too... It was fun, it was really fun.

Does your dad come for practice?

Vikram: Yeah. He'll leave work early. Definitely for Maya's basketball games he left work at noon or something just so he can make it in time and then he'll go back to work after the game. He used to coach my sister's team.

He coached me for one year, but for a little, tiny team. It wasn't a big deal and he had to leave work early and he used to make it 10 minutes early to all our practices because in his words: 'First is basketball, second is his kids, third is his clothes, and fourth is work.'

Maya: I think first is his kids.

He's got his priorities right. Does he not have the time to coach now?

Maya: He could have still coached me this year. He was hesitant, but then he said, 'You know, Maya. I'll coach if you really want me to.' He wanted to coach me;



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At the center of his universe

it was a lot of fun for him to do it the past three years. It was *I* did not have the time to do that team which he would have coached.

Vikram: Also his new job as a judge... It opened him up to a lot more free time I think. He has more time this year. **And was he a good coach?**

Maya: Yes.

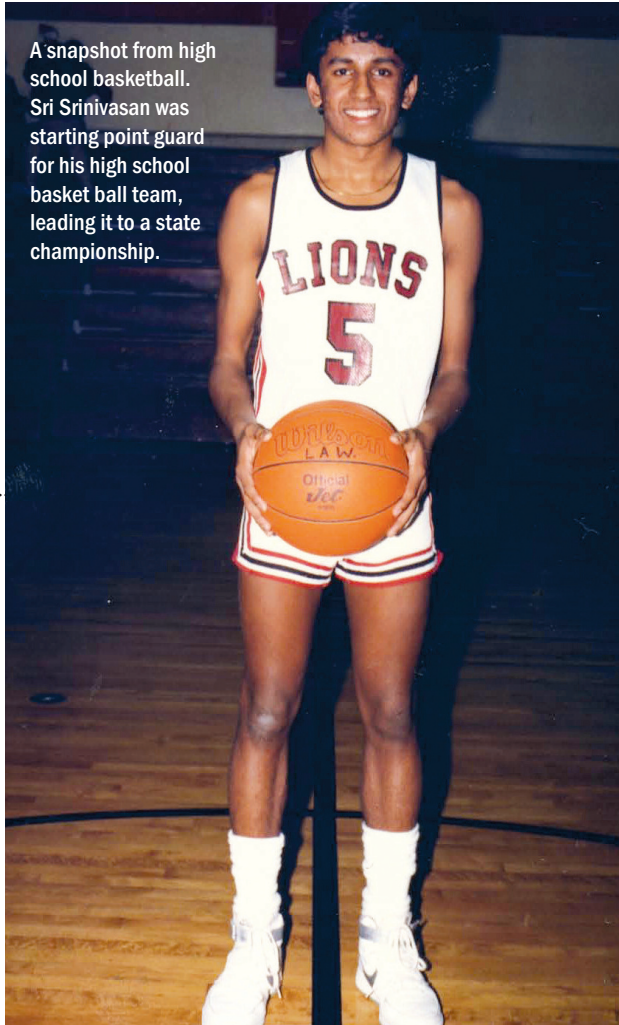
Vikram: Yeah. He was a great coach.

And when he comes for practice does he scream and shout?

Vikram: No. He is always in a good mood and fun. If one of the girls or one of us does something that you know is a little wrong he will always correct them in a nice way.

Also for Maya's team he only had one philosophy: 'Have fun.' It wasn't about winning the game or about scoring a lot of points. It was about having fun, being aggressive to

A snapshot from high school basketball. Sri Srinivasan was starting point guard for his high school basketball team, leading it to a state championship.



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try to score.

Maya: And just being a good team. He always wanted us to be a good team and be good team mates to each other.

And when you guys shoot hoops outside with him is he still a pretty good player?

Maya and Vikram: Yes.

Vikram: He has a great shot. His shots are nice.

Maya: Yeah.

Vikram: But the one thing that I think is probably toughest for him to coach us two, especially when he is coaching us two on the same team... we always get a little out of control and he has to keep us under control and he has to keep us playing great sport with each other.

Maya: Yeah. It's hard for us to play against each other or play with each other.

Vikram: It's really hard for us to play on the same court. ■

He personifies the best of America

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incredibly close relationship that the prime minister and you had with him and my mom,' he added.

'This kind of occasion happens and this opportunity came along,' Sri said, 'thanks to the decision my parents made a long, long time ago.'

He recalled how his father 'came from the humblest of humble beginnings from India. The journey that took him from there to this country and took us all to this occasion is virtually inconceivable.'

'He and my mom brought me and Srija and Srinija at a very early age in search of the classic immigrant dream — in pursuit of opportunity and happiness...'

'I'd like to think that those aspirations have been very much realized,' he said.

'My dad,' Sri said, 'grew to love this country because of the possibilities it gave us and this country loved us immensely back,' and he argued, 'There is no more sterling confirmation of that than this occasion today — what this occasion signifies and the warmth and kindness in this room.'

Three months earlier, at a felicitation reception hosted by then Indian Ambassador to the US Nirupama Rao at her residence June 17, Sri had spoken emotionally and movingly of his late father who had passed away a week earlier and dedicated the celebration of his confirmation to his dad — Professor T P Srinivasan, who taught mathematics for several years at the University of California, Berkeley. He died June 8, 2013.

There wasn't a dry eye in the room, when requesting for 'just one indulgence' to make some personal observations,' provided a moving eulogy to his father.

'As you know, yesterday was Father's Day and it was an especially poignant Father's Day for us. It's the first Father's Day that we've had without my dad.'

He described his dad as 'a great man and he had a quintessential immigrant experience. He brought his wife, my mother, and the children — my two beautiful sisters and the ugly duckling, me, to this country at an early age seeking opportunities for us. His ambitions were our ambitions, his dreams were our dreams and I think they were fully realized.'

Sri noted that 'he was in rapidly declining health by the time I was confirmed, but I am convinced — we are all convinced — that he willed himself to stay alive to see my confirmation through.'

'And we were very fortunate to have gone home to see him a couple of weeks ago when we knew he was in the last stages and last moments — we made it a point to go and visit him.'

Sri recalled how he had taken his children to visit 'and we had our last moments with him and he said two things to me that I'd like to share with you tonight.'

'By this time, he could only speak in whispers and speak only one of two words at a time.'

Sri said, 'The first, he whispered to me, 'Prime Minister,' and why would he say that?'

He explained the reason his father said that was because 'Prime Minister Singh and my dad were long time friends and colleagues from the days of the faculty together in India at Punjab University in Chandigarh. And that was a close collaboration they forged in those years as faculty rep-

resentatives and they stayed in touch — in close touch through the ensuing years and decades and he knew that the prime minister had called to congratulate him and my mom on my confirmation.'

Sri said his dad 'wanted to communicate what that meant to him — how important that was to him. In fact, the very last phone call that my dad received was from the prime minister and his wife and at that point he couldn't speak, but he could listen and my mom held the phone and the receiver to his ear so that he could hear the words of encouragement, congratulations, and of sincere devotion to him, and fidelity to their friendship. And, that meant the world to him and that's why he whispered that to me.'

The newly minted judge also said, 'The second thing he whispered to me was 97-0 (*the unanimous US Senate vote to confirm him*), how did you do it?'

'That means so much to me,' Sri said, 'because he stayed around to witness that and understand that even though he couldn't voice his pride, it was absolutely tangible in his facial expressions and emotions and there was no escaping that.'

But, he noted, 'The easiest way to answer the question of my dad is, I didn't do it. He did it — he did it — because of the opportunity he gave us when he brought us to this country, because of the example he set, and because of the values he instilled in us. He did it.'

And then turning to Rao, asked, 'I'd like to, if I could, with the permission of the Ambassador, dedicate this night, not to me, although I know it's to celebrate my confirmation, but I'd like to dedicate it to him because it was his example that shines though.'

It's this humility, love for family, the unmistakable self-deprecating humor, that has permeated thus far a career of brilliance not to mention, greatness — the future chapters of what we've not seen yet — is why it was a no-brainer that Judge Sri Srinivasan would be the India Abroad Person of the Year 2013. ■

My son, Sri

'We had no doubts he would do very well — but a federal judge with unanimous Senate confirmation was an amazing achievement. How proud it made us simply can't be put into words,' a proud mother tells **Aziz Haniffa**

Saroja Srinivasan says she could have never imagined that her son Srikanth 'Sri' Srinivasan could have scaled the heights that he has, and that certainly one of the joyous final moments of her ailing husband's life before he passed on was watching on television from their Bay Area, California, home, the unanimous vote of the US Senate in confirming Sri as a federal judge.

Professor T P Srinivasan, who taught mathematics for several years at the University of California, Berkeley, died June 8, 2013 in his Palo Alto home. Mrs Srinivasan, his wife of 49 years, as well as his children, Srikanth, Srija and Srinija, son-in-law Brad, and grandchildren, Akhil, Maya and Vikram, were at his side during his last days of declining health.

Professor Srinivasan, 81, came to the United States as a Fulbright Scholar in 1961 to UC Berkeley. He then moved to Lawrence in 1968 and served on the Kansas University Mathematics faculty for 32 years, until 2000, before he moved with his family to Northern California.

In those early years, his parents had hoped that Sri with his propensity for science in high school would go on to become a physician because that's what all Indian parents at the time wished for — that their children either become doctors or engineers.

But she noted that as parents they never imposed their wishes on their children *vis-à-vis* their career choices, "but simply wished them well."

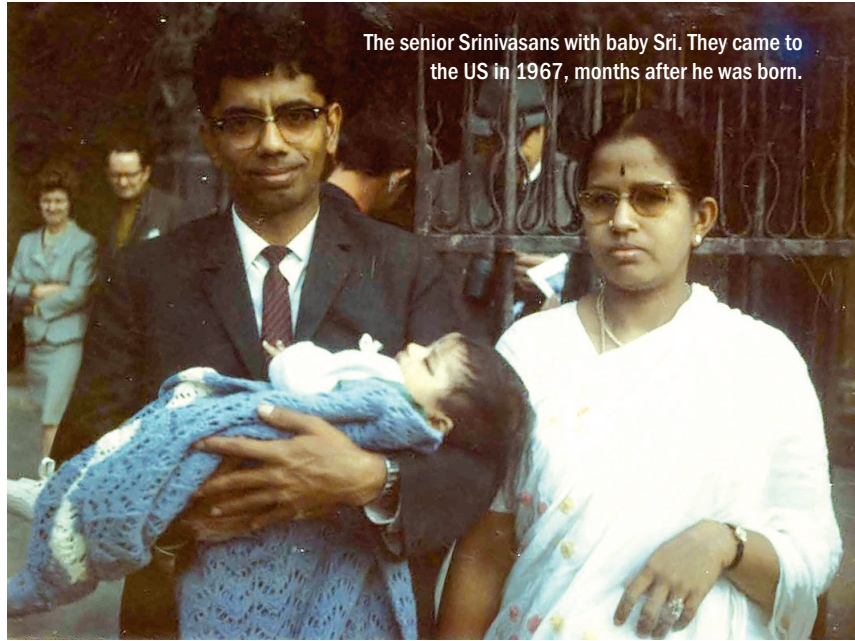
"Actually, from very early on," she added, "very consciously we were very un-Indian in that respect — we encouraged them to do whatever they were interested in."

"All that we cared about and focused on was to let them explore whatever they liked — dance, or sports or music or whatever — so that they could try various things."

She noted that Sri, born in Chandigarh, "was only a couple of months old when I came to this country," after her husband decided to move back to the US after returning to India on completing a Fulbright scholarship in 1963 to teach mathematics at the University of Punjab.

"February 1967, Sri was born and by May, we were here. In fact, I joined my husband in Russia, where he was sent by the Government of India as a scientific expert, and we came from there to the US, and the next year Srija was born."

Mrs Srinivasan said that was the time, "We both agreed that we should go somewhere else because it was the late '60s with the hippie movement and all that and we didn't think the kids should grow up here (*in California*)."



The senior Srinivasans with baby Sri. They came to the US in 1967, months after he was born.

COURTESY: THE SRINIVASANS

She said her husband "was ready to try a small campus because he said, 'I've been in this huge campus and I would love to try a small campus,' and fortunately, somebody in Kansas in his field wanted him. He went there to give a lecture and the chairman said, 'We want him,' and that's how we ended up in Lawrence."

"That is where Sri grew up and played basketball and all that — he virtually grew up on the Kansas campus."

During those early years Mrs Srinivasan said they had not detected any clues of Sri's love for advocacy. "He was very curious, but as a kid he was naturally passionate about sports, and, of course, basketball."

"One aspect I remember very clearly is from early on, from junior high or so, he would be very empathetic to other people."

"All the children were in the same grade school and all of them excelled in academics. The teachers and parents would always hold them up as models and ask, 'What's with you Indian families that your children are so good academically,' and that 'maybe we should come and watch how you do it.'"

"We felt good that they were doing well in academics and, of course, we wanted it to be the focus, but we also wanted them to be good individuals — that family and caring for people was what was most important."

She acknowledged that growing up in the small town of Lawrence "was a good atmosphere for them," and lent itself to a more interactive environment, where everybody seemed to know each other and were always there for one another.

Recalling how their wish that Sri do medicine may have gained some traction in those early years, she said, "He was more inclined toward science and his math and science was very strong. In fact, his high school teacher said he should pursue medicine, and he (*Sri*) said he would think about it."

"As a high school senior, he was invited for this college scholar program at Washington University in St Louis, where they invited 10 high school seniors across the board from the country to tell them that they are free to pursue whatever they want and graduate, but instill in them that they have the talent to pursue medicine."

"It's almost like giving admission to a medicine scholarship right after they complete their undergraduate degree," she recalled.

"My husband always wanted one of our children to go for medicine — we had a large family and we needed a doctor and that somebody should go for medicine. So, when Sri got this invitation, we were all so excited and daddy Sri was so excited."

But, Mrs Srinivasan said, "He went for the interview, but came back and said, 'No, I don't think so. I am not sure, I want to do medicine, even though my science teacher says so and daddy would like me to.'"

"And so, we weren't sure what he wanted to do, but then Stanford accepted him and he was thrilled because he had always said that was his number one choice."

"By his sophomore year, while he was majoring in human biology, Sri said he believed the law interested him and 'I would like to test the law program.' He was also interested in underprivileged people, defending their rights and trying to help them in

any way he could. Even in school, he would help these people with their mathematics and other science subjects, and his teachers were very impressed with his mentoring."

Of course, once this interest in law had captured his heart and mind, it was what he then pursued with all his vigor. "Then we had no doubts he would do very well — but a federal judge with unanimous Senate confirmation that, of course, was just an amazing achievement and how proud it made us, simply can't be put into words."

Mrs Srinivasan spoke emotionally of his "wonderful relationship with his sisters — very caring, always very protective, and, of course, with his sense of humor, he was so much fun to have around and they would always hang out together."

She also noted how strongly he felt about college athletic scholarships and how once when she had dismissed the utility of such scholarships, he had argued in their favor "that it really opened my eyes."

"Mom," he said, "if educational institutions were only for people in academics and nothing else, some of my friends who are so strong athletically will have nowhere to go to. So, it's great to have these athletic scholarships in an academic environment because it may give them the incentive to study. That's the kind of outlook he had."

"He would never put down those people, and would always talk about individual strengths different people have."

But it was when she was asked what type of a father he was that one could sense that nothing moved her as much as this question. "Oh, my goodness!" she exclaimed. "Thank you so much for asking."

"He's a typical Indian man in one sense — doesn't do much," she said laughing. "He never did much at home, in the kitchen or anything. But, oh, he's so devoted, so loving of the children from day one."

"He just adores those kids and he's so involved in their lives. Even when he was so busy in the private firm — with all kinds of briefs and Supreme Court arguments and all that — he still would always find the time to do something with them on the weekends and find time to vacation with



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'In our family, Sri has the ability to make each of us laugh'

Understanding Sri Srinivasan from the perspective of his sisters, Srija and Srinija.

Aziz Haniffa gets a rare glimpse



Sri Srinivasan with sisters Srija, left, and Srinija, right. Left, always the affectionate big brother.

At Sri Srinivasan's investiture last September, two of the toasts that were as hilarious as they were touching, evoking laughter just as much as they did poignancy, were delivered by his sisters Srija and Srinija.

The speeches clearly manifested the deep love and bonding between an older brother and his sisters — one and five years his junior, respectively — and of a family that had just lost its patriarch, their father Professor T P Srinivasan, who had passed on with such glad tidings in his heart, exclaiming in reference to the Senate confirmation of his son as a federal judge, 'Wow, 97-0. How did you do that?'

Srinija, one of Yahoo!'s first employees and now the co-founder of Looove Music, a New York-based start-up dedicated to creating and promoting a new model for the production, presentation, and equitable distribution of creative music, had introduced a sense of levity to her speech, but the flow of emotion was unmistakable.

'I get to gush about my beloved big brother in a veritable "This is your life!" gathering of his tribe — family, friends, mentors and colleagues from across time and space — from our roots in India to our childhood in Kansas through to the present day,' she said, calling herself his Number One groupie. One who had near perfect attendance at his Supreme Court arguments: 24 for 25.

Like almost everyone who spoke at the investiture ceremony, she too had basketball stories to share. After which she added, 'If he's not watching the game, Sri is the coolest head I know. He just takes things in stride. He's not unduly affected by fleeting emotions or given to rash reactions. I don't know if that's what's meant by a "judicial temperament," but it's that equanimity that allows Sri to cut through distracting drama, and consistently do something I've been witnessing my whole life — he makes it cool to do the right thing.'

Reciprocating her brother's unabashed affection towards the sisters, Srinija had said, 'When we were kids he was an unusually affectionate big brother to me, smothering me in hugs and kisses, often against my protests. He actually liked me and tried to include me when he went out with his buddies. Even I knew it wasn't cool to have your little sister in tow when you went to the movies with your sixth grade friends! But that didn't stop Sri from inviting me. As a



PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY: THE SRINIVASANS

teenager, at an age when it's so tempting to be out with friends — anywhere but home — Sri didn't lose sight of prioritizing time with family. I saw this, and I remember thinking, "If he thinks it matters, it must be cool."

And according to Srinija, in doing so, Sri radiated the cultural values their parents had imparted: 'At the heart of the Bhagavad Gita on which Sri is today sworn in, lies the central teaching from Krishna to Arjuna that one's karma — one's duty — is selfless action. Doing the work without attachment to the outcome. Somewhere along the line, Sri absorbed this cultural DNA... In this look-at-me era, Sri is unfashionably incapable of self-promotion.'

Srija, director of strategic operations, San Mateo County Health System, California, who was born just 363 days after Sri, gushed about her big brother even as recalled, as only siblings can, their squabbles.

'From an early age,' she recalled, 'Sri has had an ability to see an end goal to advocate for, anticipate the opposing arguments he might encounter and have at least one path that could lead him to the result he seeks. As a high school kid, it could go something like the following: "Srija, now that you're making yourself lunch, can you make me lunch too? Sri, why don't you make your own lunch? Srija, if you won't make me lunch, I'm going to ask mom to, and you know, she will" — which is absolutely true given her selfless

and giving nature.' End result: I actually learn how to cook; Sri starts thinking that law school may be a good fit for him.'

And as was evident by then, any description of Sri had to circle around to his priorities — his family, his professional responsibilities, and the Kansas Jayhawks basketball team.

'They generally fall in that order — family, job, Jayhawks — but not on every day,' Srija said. 'Even during the important developments in the nomination process to fill this judgeship, the turnaround time on an e-mail was actually quicker in response to the Jayhawks' stellar recruiting than in the messages related to the next steps in the confirmation process.'

She then went on to speak about the other facet that made Sri so endearing — that he was such a decent human being filled with humility made even more attractive by a mischievous sense of humor.

'As I think Sri would be the first to acknowledge, he has definitely had a lot of luck — lucky to be born to two phenomenal parents, who left their home country of India and their own families to pursue greater opportunities for their children, lucky to grow up in an inclusive university town that had excellent public schools, lucky to have many doors open to him professionally with the great advice of incredible mentors and role models,' she said.

'I also know that he has created a lot of the luck by who he is, a really smart, hard-working, humble person who cares deeply about the people and world around him, and has an ability to bring joy and humor to every group of which he is a part.'

'At his core, he is just a tremendously great guy.'

They had both said it all. But then I was going to try for more anecdotes, more vignettes, and while Srinija gave me the slip, I cottoned on to Srija.

It started rather philosophically, with



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My son, Sri

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them. And, lately, he's loved coaching the children's basketball team and things like that."

"In fact, Maya's friends keep telling her... 'Please tell your dad to come back and coach us — we really love him as a coach.'"

Mrs Srinivasan received a master's degree in Sanskrit from Madras University, and refers to her husband also as 'Sri'. "I finished first in the University, but never finished my PhD program because two years into the program, I got married and then I joined Sri (*Professor Srinivasan*) in Chandigarh," she says.

"I tried to continue the program there, but little Sri was born and we were coming to the United States, so I never got a chance to complete the PhD program."

But "when we moved to Kansas, I went back to school and did a master's in the history of art and taught at the Kansas City Art Institute for a few years."

"With the children at home and Sri (*Professor Srinivasan*) already chairman for the past couple of years, it was hard for the children — the parents not being there very much, almost like what it is today — and we both didn't like it... So, I gave up my teaching position in Kansas City because the children needed more attention."

"Then I went back and did computer programming class-



COURTESY: THE SRINIVASANs

Sri, center, and Srijia Srinivasan, second from right, with the family — father T P Srinivasan, sister Srinija, and mother Saroja — at their graduation from Stanford.

es — computer analyses — and ended up at the University of Kansas as a programming analyst. That's how I retired after almost 20 years."

A PhD in Sanskrit still beckons, but Mrs Srinivasan says she is done with studying and wants to enjoy her children rewind, grandchildren — at every opportunity. ■

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'In our family, Sri has the ability to make each of us laugh'

Srijia telling *India Abroad*, "Our parents were thoughtful sustainers of our Indian heritage, while also being unwavering supporters of any interest we exhibited in our childhood."

"Perhaps the roots of Sri's diplomacy and ability to garner bipartisan support were planted in that duality — he managed to appreciate my dad's presence at every one of his junior high and high school basketball games, even though he routinely brought a newspaper or a mathematics textbook to read during timeouts or halftime. Maybe we should have foreseen his impressive professional trajectory as an advocate through his ability to convert our parents to become basketball fans who yelled at the referees by the time we were in college."

Srijia, once again, had to speak about his humor — a facet that permeates his entire being and almost seemed as what, in the final analysis, sustains him: "It is not at all surprising that Sri's intellect and temperament are the most-cited assets he brings to his important role on the DC Appellate Court. As his sister, I would say that his warmth and humor are at least as impressive. At any gathering, in any room,

with any group, Sri is able to put others at ease. And, he does not take for granted the small pleasures of spending time with those who can bring out the best in each other."

"In our family," she said, "Sri has the ability to make each of us laugh, sometimes to the point of tears streaming down my face. It wasn't ideal, when he was sitting next to me in class at Stanford, but now that we have our degrees, I look forward to any occasion to hang out with my big brother."

"Even his 12-year old twins — let's remember that adults are not the favored company of most 12-year-olds — love spending time with their dad. And our 10-year old son is always excited to shoot hoops or have a tabla/drum contest with his uncle."

Sri's circle of admirers was wide even in the siblings' youth. "In high school," Srijia revealed, "he had friends in almost every group/club that existed in a public high school of 1,800 kids that included organizations for very competitive varsity sports, several bands and an orchestra, a Latin

club, a student government and a strong Future Farmers of America group."

But she couldn't end without a crack at her brother's sardonic passion — nay excess — saying, "One of our most memorable trips back to India during our childhood was for Sri to complete the Hindu rituals that boys complete as they move from youth to adulthood. I don't remember him having any difficulty in mastering the Sanskrit chanting, though he had a penchant for style even at that young age and had definite opinions of how he looked in a *dhoti* and that not being the most flattering attire for a rail-thin 11 year old."

Adding that she had heard that *India Abroad's* Person of the Year awards gala and dinner "was an evening of beauty and glamour, as well as heartfelt support for prominent leaders who are making their mark on the world," she quipped, "We hope Sri can adjust to the somewhat rare occasion of not being the best dressed person in the room, given his reputation as a connoisseur of fine suits and ties." ■

Basketball and other family stories

'It soon became clear that I had no choice but to become a Kansas basketball fan.'

Bradley Joondeph spills the beans on his B-I-L

Bradley Joondeph, Sri Srinivasan's brother-in-law, teaches Constitutional law at Santa Clara University, and knew Sri even before he met Srija, the judge's sister. One year behind him as an undergraduate, but in his same law school class, Professor Joondeph says Sri is not just a relative but his closest buddy and confidante, second only to his wife.

"I met Sri independently of meeting Srija and did not know they were siblings for several months," he said, "Thank goodness, I was on relatively good behavior around Sri."

"We played basketball often together as undergrads. I tried to play defense and set screens. Sri liked to shoot. Lots. But that was a good division of labor for the two of us."

"Sri and I ran as a 'slate' for President and Managing Editor of the Stanford Law Review when we were second year students, but we both lost. We were quite naïve — we did no campaigning of any sort, and were rather indifferent about whether we were going to be elected."

"It was a harbinger of sorts, I guess," he said. "Sri has definitely ended up in the branch of government that best suits his personality."

"Although the family put absolutely no pressure on me to convert to Hinduism," Joondeph reveals, "it soon became clear that I had no choice but to become a Kansas basketball fan. One year, we purchased tickets to first and second round NCAA games in Kansas City about nine months in advance, long before you could have any idea which teams would be there."

"This was when we lived in California, Sri in Virginia. Kansas was then sent to Memphis for its first and second round games. So what did we do? We flew to Kansas City Friday morning and watched the four games there that day, then drove through the night, nine hours, to Memphis, and watched Kansas defeat Purdue — this was the Paul Pierce-Raef LaFrentz team."

"Then we drove all night back to Lawrence, slept for two hours; drove into Kansas City for the two second round games Sunday, and then flew home. I have spent a great deal of time in cars in planes with the Srinivasan family going to and from Kansas University games."

"Sri is certainly much more than a brother-in-law to me. Aside from Srija, he is probably my dearest friend. He is



Sri Srinivasan, left, partnered with his future brother-in-law Bradley Joondeph, second from left, at their moot court at Stanford Law where they won before a panel of three Ninth Circuit judges.

COURTESY: THE SRINIVASANS

so kind, so genuinely warm, it really is an honor to be a part of his family."

But, he confided, "Being in his family has occasionally posed some small practical challenges. He is not the most planful individual, especially when it comes to travel — other than traveling to KU games. More than once, Sri has purchased plane tickets and reserved hotels for the wrong days for family events, including my sister's wedding."

"Not a big deal, of course. But he needs occasional reminders on the minor details of life that us mere mortals traffic in on a daily basis. Our 10-year-old son Akhil still laughs when he remembers that Sri once put away the goat cheese in an unrefrigerated pantry, apparently confused by the paper wrapping."

Joondeph also spoke of how "Sri and I were moot court partners in law school, and actually prevailed as the winning team before a panel of three Ninth Circuit judges. Sri was fantastic as an oral advocate — an indication of what was to come in his career as a lawyer. I learned a ton from him during that competition."

But what about those college days?

"Sri's car in college was affectionately known as the 'Jet Black Rocket,' or JBR. It certainly did not perform like a jet or a rocket. It was black, though. It was not really a

'chick magnet,' so to speak. And he and Srija shared it, meaning he often left it for her empty of gas. Again, life's details."

"As Sri's son Vikram has attested, 'Most of the time he is not too late to things,'" he added.

"Among many things about Sri I admire, he is just a phenomenal son. I have the privilege of living just two blocks from my Momiar (*mother-in-law*). She obviously takes such great pride in Sri, and of course, all three of her children and grandchildren. But it really is amazing the tenderness and thoughtfulness and love he shares with his mother. It is a truly wonderful quality."

"I would also be remiss if I did not

mention how much I owe to Sri in terms of my professional advancement. It was through Sri that I got to meet Judge Deanell Tacha, for whom I clerked on the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals. And it was while Sri was clerking at the Supreme Court that I got to meet Justice O'Connor, eventually garnering an interview and a clerkship."

"Without those opportunities, I doubt I ever would have ended up where I am today in my career. I really owe most of it to him — and, of course, Srija."

"He is also a terrific brother to Srija, always there for her if she hits any sort of rough patch. Being married to me, I assume, requires some moral support."

"That is not to say he is above relying on Srija to purchase the 'collective' gifts for various members of the family, for every occasion, every year. Again, logistics like that can escape Sri. But he has always been there for Srija for anything that really mattered."

While Joondeph concedes he's obviously biased, he says his b-i-l "really is a worthy recipient," of being selected as *India Abroad's* Person of the Year, but adds, "As much as I am proud of his professional accomplishments, I actually have much more admiration for him as a person."

— Aziz Haniffa

‘We are so lucky as a nation to have him serve as a federal judge’

Justice Sandra Day O'Connor looks back at the time when Sri Srinivasan clerked for her and shares her elation on swearing him in as an Appeals Court Judge in the DC circuit — second in importance only to the US Supreme Court — with **Aziz Haniffa**

Justice Sandra Day O'Connor administers the oath of justice to Sri Srinivasan — who she calls one of her best law clerks and a marvelous lawyer — at his investiture ceremony. Bottom, Srinivasan and Justice O'Connor in the early years of their acquaintance.

Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, now 84, for whom Sri Srinivasan clerked on the Supreme Court in the 1997-1998 term, perks up when I call her in her chambers to ask for her recollections about Srinivasan.

“He was a superb and wonderful law clerk — one of my best and I’ve had quite a few through the years,” she says.

O'Connor, who was appointed by President Ronald Reagan in 1981, was the first woman to be appointed to the Supreme Court, and served till January 31, 2006. “I enjoyed his efforts the year he was with me enormously,” she added.

“He provided great help and it was so nice to get to work with him so closely for that entire year,” she said, and reiterated, “I appreciated that enormously. He’s really a marvelous lawyer.”

On September 26, 2013, O'Connor — who was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian honor in the United States by President Obama on August 12, 2009 — administered the oath to Srinivasan, swearing him in as the new federal judge in the US Court of Appeals in the District of Columbia.

Just before she administered the oath, she said, ‘What a treat this is for all of us,’ and predicted that Srinivasan would ‘be a superb judge on the Court of Appeals and our nation will be enriched,’ by his assuming this office.

Srinivasan, in his remarks, after putting on his robes as the new judge on the bench, thanked O'Connor for being on hand to administer ‘the oath as only you can do,’ and recalled that ‘you challenged me from the very first day I met for the interview for my clerkship.’

‘You’ve challenged me over the years and you’ve challenged all of us and we are all the better for it,’ he said.

In the interview with *India Abroad*, O'Connor, who, since her retirement has devoted much of her time and energy to the cause of judicial selection, said, “I am so thrilled that he has been selected for this honor,” when this correspondent informed her that he had been adjudged *India Abroad*’s Person of the Year, and added, “I liked him so much and he did a great job for me. I was so happy when the President nominated him and the Senate confirmed him so unanimously to be on the Court of Appeals on the District of Columbia.”

When I told her that I was there covering Srinivasan’s investiture and had witnessed her administering the oath, she excitedly reminisced, “Wasn’t it a nice ceremony? I liked it too very much. It was very moving, very touching.”

“He’s great — and I think we are so lucky as a nation to have him now serving as a federal judge,” she said.

When asked if she had experienced Srinivasan’s self-deprecating sense of humor, O'Connor said, “He does



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have a great sense of humor and I so enjoyed having him as one of my law clerks.”

She also spoke of his humility and noted, “He’s such a down-to-earth person and, of course, so knowledgeable — that’s the main thing that I like. He’s such a good writer and a good thinker.”

O'Connor acknowledged that she had strongly endorsed his nomination by President Obama and said her unstinted support was “because I knew him well — he worked for me for a year. I knew his work, I knew his capability, and I had nothing but good things to say.”

“When the President nominated him,” she added, “I couldn’t have been more thrilled. It was such a good choice. I was so honored to be there to swear him in. It was such a wonderful ceremony — it was great.” ■

‘I’ve always referred to Sri as a bridge over troubled waters’

Judge J Harvie Wilkinson III salutes his former law clerk

It seems like just yesterday to me when the eminent Stanford constitutional law professor, Gerald Gunther, called me to recommend Sri Srinivasan for a clerkship in my chambers. I remember the conversation very well.

Professor Gunther’s point was that Sri had been of immeasurable help to him on a project he had just completed, a biography of Judge Learned Hand. Since Sri was his student assistant, I asked him, “Did Mr Srinivasan do a good job with the proofreading?” and he said, ‘No, you misunderstand. Mr Srinivasan supplied seminal insights into Judge Hand’s judicial service.’

Wow, I said to myself. Gunther and Hand: That was quite a one-two punch, the Ruth and Gehrig of American Constitutional Law. I better take a look at this Mr Srinivasan.

And when somebody so well-credentialed walks into your office for an interview — a clerkship interview — I always look for those disqualifying traits of arrogance. And I suspect the kind of interview that all judges want is one that makes you feel like you have known — that it’s not an interview at all, but that you’ve known the applicant for years. And that’s the way this interview went. I felt like I had known Sri practically all my life, and at the end of our talk,

I extended an offer and made one of the best decisions of my life.

Sri has been inducted into all sorts of places these days. I think you should know that this Saturday (*in September 2013*), he will become a member of the Lawrence, Kansas, High School Hall of Fame.

I’ll leave it to Sri to tell us which is the higher honor, this occasion today or the one at Lawrence on Saturday.

Anyway, therein lies a little story. Sri is a great basketball fan, but he loves Kansas basketball in particular. In fact, the only time I’ve ever seen him lose his judicial temperament was when the legendary Kansas coach, Roy Williams, left the Jayhawks to return to his alma mater, North Carolina. I tried to console Sri by saying, ‘Look at it this way, Sri: The coach is simply returning to the Fourth Circuit. He’s coming home.’

Wrong. Sri would have absolutely none of it, and I soon began to understand why.

Every now and then, a law clerk will send me a T-shirt of their favorite team to wear on my jogs and runs, and most of them have perfectly acceptable messages.

‘Go Terps,’ ‘Go Heels,’ ‘Go Irish,’ and the like. Sri’s T-shirt was unfortunately not so subdued.

It had a giant picture of a basketball and a jayhawk festooned with the huge words ‘Kansas basketball is life; the rest is details.’

So you can take comfort in the fact that this young gen-

tleman enters upon his judicial career with his priorities straight.

And Judge Garland (*the Chief Judge of the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit*), I know that exhibits are not recommended for appellate arguments but... I did bring this T-shirt. You can see it. I’m not kidding.

I would ask you to come up and take a look at it, but it’s sweaty after all these many miles.

People will stop me on the track and say, ‘J, I didn’t know you were a Kansas basketball fan,’ and I’ll say, ‘I didn’t know I was one, either — but I’m wearing this T-shirt under pain of banishment,’ and then we’ll begin to talk about Sri.

I think all of you know just how much affection and admiration Sri has for Justice Sandra Day O’Connor and what a special year he spent as a clerk in her chambers, but it must be admitted that things got off to a bit of a rocky start.

Sri had, unbeknownst to me and unbeknownst to anyone, called Justice O’Connor’s chambers to ask if a scheduled Friday clerkship interview could be postponed to the following Monday because of, get this, a longstanding social engagement. So I found Justice O’Connor suddenly on the other end of the phone.

And she was not in a happy mood.

This is going nowhere good, I told myself as Justice O’Connor asked: ‘Does this Mr Srinivasan care at all about the law, or is it all about his social life?’ I didn’t even know what was going on.

But I blurted out, ‘Oh, Justice O’ Connor, Sri just lives and breathes the law!’

‘Nothing else even matters to him! In fact, Sri gets up thinking about the law even before he brushes his teeth!’

‘Well,’ she said, ‘you know who has the burden of proof on that point when he arrives in chambers on Monday.’ Eventually, after a probing interview with Justice O’Connor, Sri got the clerkship, but only after sinking a putt on the carpet of the Justice’s chambers. No putt, no clerkship.

Well, the putt sank, the rest is history, and it has come to be known as The Putt Heard Around The World.

Now, all of us judges expect our law clerks to out earn us almost as soon as they get their hands on the bonus, but we don’t necessarily expect our clerks to outrank us as well, so you can imagine how a provincial feels when he comes to visit the second highest court in the land.

I’m not completely sure of the protocol, but as a member of the second highest court in the land, Sri, I know I’m

At Sri Srinivasan’s investiture ceremony, Judge J Harvie Wilkinson III showed off a T-shirt he received from his former law clerk.



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supposed to salute you — but it’s the genuflection that I want to get exactly right. We’re a southern circuit down here in the Fourth — as you know, Sri — and we put a great deal of stock in etiquette.

All kidding aside, I just want to spend a final moment talking about this absolutely wonderful judge and the great court he’s joined. I would say to my friends on the DC Circuit that they could not have a better colleague.

Sri is lightning smart and super dedicated, but he’s never believed he has all the answers, and he will help revive the lost art of listening. Public life is all too polarized, but certain special people have a unique capacity to bring the rest of us together, and that’s why I’ve always referred to Sri as a bridge over troubled waters in a turbulent day and time.

Perhaps people define judicial temperament in many different ways, but perhaps the ideal judicial temperament rivals the serenity of the treetops on a beautiful summer evening. But in the heat of battle, understandably, none of us ever reach that state of affairs.

Some do come closer than others to getting there, and Sri will be among the very closest of all.

And Sri, I would say to you that you’re about to join a most distinguished court. I have known many of its members for quite some decades, and I count on the bench of the DC Circuit a great many good friends. My daughter Porter had a splendid year clerking on this court for Judge Brett Kavanaugh, and my own time on the bench has led me to profound respect for the professional quality and the personal decency of the members of the DC Circuit. The nicest occasions are always those that celebrate happy unions, so it is when a great judge unites with a great court.

Some crystal balls are cloudy, but not this one. Sri Srinivasan will become a superb and much admired judge. He will at all times reflect credit upon the federal judiciary and upon this magnificent tribunal. It is a pleasure to be present at the start of the journey. It shall please each of us always to remember this day. ■

Judge J Harvie Wilkinson joined the United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit in 1984, serving as Chief Judge from 1996 until 2003. Judge Sri Srinivasan clerked for Judge Wilkinson during the 1995-96 court term.

Excerpted, with kind permission, from his speech at Judge Srinivasan’s investiture ceremony.

‘Expect more amazing things from him, one of which will make American history’

Preet Bharara and Neal Katyal, ardent admirers of Sri Srinivasan, speak to **Aziz Haniffa**

Not since I asked Jersey boy Preet Bharara, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York — who grew up in Monmouth County — about his idol Bruce Springsteen has he gushed as much as he did when I called to interview him about Sri Srinivasan.

He said he had gotten to know Srinivasan quite recently during the latter's tenure as Principal Deputy Solicitor General and also in connection when his nomination for a federal judgeship came up for confirmation before the Senate Judiciary Committee — one that Bharara served on in an earlier incarnation as a senior staffer — and it had quickly blossomed “into a collegial, friendly relationship.”

From that day on, Bharara said, “I am a huge admirer of his,” and noted that even in his recent speech to the graduating class of Harvard Law School, “the important point I make is people should be humble and have humility, and he (*Srinivasan*) certainly does.”

“He’s a person who’s so smart and so accomplished, but he doesn’t wear it on his sleeve. He’s a regular person, and humility as I often say, is a very under-represented quality in the law, especially on the part of people as successful and credentialed as Sri.”

“The fact that he’s down to earth and at the same time a brilliant lawyer and a successful one,” Bharara added, “speaks volumes about what kind of a person he is.”

Another highly attractive quality, he felt, was Srinivasan’s self-deprecating humor. “I am a big fan of people who can make fun of themselves and I don’t think people do it enough. So, overall, he’s a great lawyer and a successful person, but more importantly, he is a down to earth and humble person, which is why people like him and respect him so much.”

Bharara, who witnessed Srinivasan testify before the Senate Judiciary Committee, said he was highly impressed by his performance, especially how he countered the many curve balls thrown by the more conservative Republican Senators, who for months had been blocking President Obama’s federal judge nominations, but after listening to Srinivasan confirmed him unanimously — as did the full Senate later by a vote of 97-0 — after they found him to be a straight-shooter, not to mention endearing.

“When you look at his record and you look at his temperament, it’s hard to oppose someone as genuine and talented as Sri is. And I think they saw that,” Bharara said.

There was no indication whatsoever from his record or his answers where he could be perceived as a potential political activist judge, Bharara acknowledged. “He’s a guy who does his job and is straightforward,” he said, irrespective of which President, Democrat or Republican, had



COURTESY: CAPAC-CHU.HOUSE.GOV

Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus members, from right, US representatives, from right, Judy Chu, Ami Bera, Grace Meng and Mike Honda at the Senate Judiciary Hearing for Sri Srinivasan, third from left.

nominated him.

In his interactions with Srinivasan on judicial matters and its nuances, Bharara said he had found him “incredibly careful, rigorous, prepared and measured. He has the perfect temperament, not only for the Circuit Court, but perhaps in the future for the Supreme Court.”

He pointed out that Srinivasan had “achieved much more than anyone else in the judicial field for someone with South Asian origins.”

Despite these unprecedented achievements and heights he had climbed in this country’s legal area, Bharara argued it did not preclude people “aspiring further for him” in rationalizing the constant buzz that if a Supreme Court vacancy crops up anytime soon, Srinivasan would be a strong contender.

Asked how he would rate Srinivasan as a role model not only for young Indian-American or South Asian American lawyers, but also for the broader mainstream stable of young attorneys, he said, “I don’t know how much I believe in people being role models for specific ethnic groups, but Sri is a role model for every aspiring lawyer — not just aspiring lawyers, but for every public servant. Do your job, do it well, without any fanfare and self-aggrandizement, and it shows how far you can go if you are just smart and diligent, work hard, stick to the facts, and get the job done.”

“I am a big fan of Sri,” Bharara reiterated, “and I want to make sure I am on the record.”

Echoing similar sentiments is Neal Katyal — the former Principal Deputy Solicitor General and erstwhile Professor of Law at Georgetown University

who successfully defended Osama bin Laden’s chauffeur in the US Supreme Court.

“Sri and I found ourselves in the Summer of 1994 in the Solicitor General’s Office — probably the first two Indians to ever serve in that Office, even as interns.”

“We were constantly being confused for one another by the good folks in the Office,” Katyal said, adding, “This was odd because I look nothing like Sri,” and quipped, “fortunately.”

But, he noted, “in all seriousness, Sri struck me then — as he strikes me now — as a brilliant man, a gentle soul, a caring individual. We became friends then and never lost touch.”

“When I came into the Solicitor General’s Office as the Deputy Solicitor General, it was Sri I turned to for advice, because he had been a remarkable line attorney in that Office years before. Sri did more than give me advice: He literally gave me the coat off his back.”

“Solicitor General lawyers must wear a formal morning coat, something that I didn’t own,” Katyal explained, “But Sri did, and he lent it to me. I wore it for two years, at every argument I gave at the Supreme Court.”

“But the circle returns itself,” he said, “When I left the Solicitor General’s Office, I told the Attorney General that there was one person who should replace me — Sri Srinivasan. Sri got that job. And he got his coat back.”

“Sri is a remarkable man,” Katyal declared. “It has been my privilege, as a fellow lawyer and a friend, to watch him blossom and yet stay true to the man he has always been.”

“I expect we will be seeing some more amazing things from him in the years to come, at least one of which will make American history.” ■

‘Incredibly accomplished, incredibly brilliant’

‘There are very few people who achieve this kind of stature in life who you still can connect with at that very immediate level as a human being,’ human rights lawyer-activist Amrit Singh, winner of the India Abroad Publisher’s Special Award for Excellence 2012, tells **Aziz Haniffa**

“We are family friends and we go back a long way. Our families have known each other since we’ve been children,” says Amrit Singh, the senior legal officer for national security and counter-terrorism at the Open Society Justice Initiative of the Open Society Foundations.

She was the winner of the India Abroad Publisher’s Special Award for Excellence 2012.

Singh has known Srinivasan the longest outside of his family, since her dad, former Indian prime minister Dr Manmohan Singh and Srinivasan’s father, the late Professor T P Srinivasan, were colleagues at the University of Punjab in Chandigarh.

“My earliest recollection of Sri was really in the context of when their family visited us in Delhi — we must have been about seven or something — and I remember he left behind this toothpaste, which was a blue gel and we’d never seen a toothpaste like that before. But, that’s my earliest recollection of Sri — the bright blue toothpaste that he and his family used.”

“Our parents have enormous affection for each other. I remember aunty and Srinivasan uncle and the three kids who were so well-behaved. Then years later we would always hear of how illustrious all three children were — all of them now frankly are geniuses,” adds Singh.

More than her, following those early interactions, she said the parents had kept in touch, although “we all heard about how well they were doing — Sri is doing this, Srinija is doing that and so on.”

“All of them being so incredibly accomplished, all of them are also so incredibly humble,” she added. “Saroja aunty and my mother always continued to be in touch — they talked regularly and my dad would also speak to Srinivasan uncle.”

Her next interaction with Sri, after those early visits by the Srinivasans to Delhi, “was in DC — we had a common friend and that’s how we came into contact quite by chance.”

“What strikes me about Sri is that’s he’s somebody who



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really knows who he is. He’s very comfortable with himself, and so he doesn’t need to pretend to be anything other than himself.”

“That I think allows him to have genuine interactions with people, despite the fact that he obviously is incredibly accomplished, incredibly brilliant,” she added. “But when he relates to you, he relates to you as a normal human being, which is how it should be, and that’s what is so wonderful about him.”

“He’s a very warm, very compassionate person. At the same time, he has this obvious intellectual brilliance that’s apparent. So, it’s so nice to see that in a person who’s achieved so much, but still remains so incredibly grounded.”

Her interactions with him thus far, she said, had been wholly personal and not professional. “I’ve known him essentially as a family friend and so our paths have not crossed professionally. We have a personal connection and don’t really talk about work. It’s a very, very old friendship that his parents had with my parents and we often talk

about family stuff.”

Singh wasn’t done in emphasizing the perfect package that is Sri Srinivasan. “He has all of the qualities that we should all aspire to — the best of the Indian and the best of the American are embodied by Sri,” she said.

“It’s so clear that he really knows who he is. There are very few people who achieve this kind of stature in life who you still can connect with at that very immediate level as a human being, and I think that’s a wonderful quality about him.”

“He inspires so much pride among people around him,” Singh said. “You were there at the investiture where it was so apparent at the number of people and the things they said about him.”

“Some of these people who got so emotional talking about him — that’s such a rare sight,” she noted. “That’s the kind of person he is, a very genuine person. He inspires that in other people and you are able to connect very instinctively with a warm person such as he is.” ■

'He always keeps an open mind'

'Sri is so fair as a professional and that's why he's got the kind of respect he's gotten from not just the legal community, but also from our community,' Arunima Bhargava tells **Aziz Haniffa**

Anurima Bhargava considers Sri Srinivasan an older brother. She often gets emotional, especially when pointing out the several instances where he would be so encouraging and so scrupulous in introducing the likes of her and other up and coming young attorneys to the powers that be. He wouldn't ever ignore any one of them despite the heights he'd achieved and the powerful and influential legal circles in which he moved; he was always humble and never let it affect him.

Her association with Srinivasan began in 2008, "when we were working on a Supreme Court case together. Sri was at the law firm (*O'Melveny*) and I was at the NAACP Legal Defense Fund and it was a case pertaining to services for English language learners and it was a case out of Arizona."

"Sri ended up arguing the case, so we worked closely. That's when I first met him and at a lunch just after the argument, I met his mom and his sisters. Now, Srinija and I have become very close friends. Over the last couple of years, I've spent a lot of time with the family, and, of course, Sri and myself, became very close friends after that lunch. We're family now and it's been lovely."

"My parents have spent time with them and we've had a wonderful relationship," Bhargava added.

Asked what qualities endeared him to her, she said, "I can give a speech about that for hours. The thing about him that is amazing is that he has always welcomed me and others, who are young lawyers, particularly young South Asian lawyers, with open arms and a lot of advice."

"First of all, he's a brilliant lawyer and advocate and someone, I can learn a lot from — and from that process when we worked together on that case, I learned a lot from him."

"Second, this lunch I told you about after this argument, he said, no ifs and buts, you have to join us for lunch and there was nothing but a sort of a sense of naturalness about that," Bhargava added.

"People know him as this guy who ended up becoming a DC Circuit Court judge, but I know him as this guy with whom I've had coffee, had lunch, who invited me — a young lawyer — that first time without even as much as giving it a second thought. And, most of the people who've had coffee with him or lunch with him at some point in those early years, he's always continued to take their calls."

"Obviously now," Bhargava acknowledged, "it's a very different situation and he can't do it like he used to, but he still does it and remains accessible. And that's what's great about him — that there's this humble accessibility that you don't really find with a lot of folks in the kind of position he's been in and now is in an even higher position."

"He speaks with honesty and candor and calm about all the kind of work that we are doing — us young lawyers — and those are all the things that endeared me to him. In many ways, I think of him as an older brother and that's the way in which that interaction occurs."



Sri Srinivasan with his father T P Srinivasan during his Supreme Court clerkship year. Arunima Bhargava remembers the day Judge Sri was unanimously confirmed by the Senate last year she walked into his office expecting a celebration and found him alone thinking about his father, who was then in fragile health but had seen the vote.

COURTESY: THE SRINIVASANS

"He's not someone who doesn't understand that people have difficulties along the way to getting to where they are. So, he hasn't forgotten that."

"I also thoroughly enjoy the fact that the things that make him incredibly crazy and passionate is basketball because that's the kind of way in which he is human — in the way that we should all strive for — which is that basketball is as important as a Supreme Court case where we must give it our all."

"You were at the investiture, and it was so momentous for all of us, but there was something magical about what happened in that room that day and in the toast from everyone, including his sisters, the toast from Irv (*Irving L Gornstein, Executive Director, Supreme Court Institute*) was so emotional too — about what it felt to have not only a personal connection with someone, but a deeply personal one. And, those are all the kinds of things that are so meaningful."

"Sri is so fair as a professional and that's why he's got the kind of respect he's gotten from not just the legal community, but also from our community. You cannot label him — he's not a raging Democrat, he's not a Republican."

"It's really heartening that he always keeps an open mind and will always hear all sides."

"His relationship with his kids, Vikram and Maya, the extent to which that is the most important thing to him, I hope that in this world, that's something we all aspire to."

"I want to see frankly, fathers, Indian fathers, who are professionally successful, who care so deeply about their children, who are so proud of them for all the things that

they do."

Getting emotional once again, she spoke of how "Sri is such a kindred spirit to me and so many others and our families are front and center for him. And, to have that be true and be professionally successful in this climate and at that level is really remarkable."

"I know you already know this because you've been with him and written so much about him, but any profile of him has to start with the fact that that's the core of it."

"I remember walking to his office after the Senate vote and I would think he would have 20, 25 people at least in his office and everybody would be celebrating," Bhargava recalled. "But he's standing there on his own and he's just gotten a call from his mom, saying that his father was awake for the vote, and for him that's all that matters."

"He was just standing there thinking about his father and that's it."

"He wears his father, he wears his family, he wears his upbringing in Lawrence, Kansas, he wears all of that without fanfare, but with deep love and commitment and grace."

Then she lightened up, pulled herself together and suggested, "You should absolutely talk to him about his sense of style and fashion — he's at the top of fashion."

"He a very fashionable guy and I won't say anything about how many shoes or clothes he has as it will get me in a lot of trouble," she said laughing. "But I will say, the passions of his life are probably basketball and fashion, which most people wouldn't know. You should talk to him about his fashion sense, which is quite amazing." ■

‘Sri’s brilliance is rivaled only by his character’

Alejandro Mayorkas, Deputy Secretary, Department of Homeland Security, tell **Aziz Haniffa** what it means to have Sri Srinivasan as a friend



Sri Srinivasan, second from right, visits with, from left, Senator Mark Warner, Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Patrick Leahy and Senator Tim Kaine in Washington, DC last year.

CHIP SOMODEVILLA/GETTY IMAGES

Alejandro ‘Ali’ Mayorkas, Deputy Secretary, Department of Homeland Security — the number two person in the Department — first met Sri Srinivasan when both were in private practice at O’Melveny & Myers. They were then colleagues in government service in the Solicitor General’s Office. “He is,” said Mayorkas, “an extraordinarily deserving recipient” of the India Abroad Person of the Year Award.

While working at O’Melveny, he recalled, “We had the opportunity to work together on a numbers of matters.” Sri and he, Mayorkas added, formed “not only our working relationship, but also our close friendship.”

Mayorkas, erstwhile Director of the US Citizenship and Immigration Services who was confirmed by the US Senate as Deputy Secretary of the DHS December 20,

2013, believes, “Sri’s brilliance is rivaled only by his character, which is one of not only humility, but dignity.”

“And both his brilliance and his character is surpassed only by his devotion to family,” he added.

When this correspondent reminded him that he may have inadvertently omitted Sri’s passion for basketball, Mayorkas immediately exclaimed, “Excuse me!” and corrected himself, “Surpassed only by his devotion to this family and the Kansas Jayhawks.”

He acknowledged that he tries to interact with Sri as much as their schedules permit, adding, “I love him as a dear friend and so does my family.”

Mayorkas pointed out how professionally scrupulous Sri is manifested itself during his confirmation before the Senate Judiciary Committee when several conservative

Republican Senators flung curve balls at him in an obvious attempt to test any alleged liberal bias he may have politically, because he was nominated by President Obama, a Democratic President. These Senators were left in awe of his judicial temperament and unanimously voted in favor of his confirmation.

“He understands what the oath means and is loyal to the law and its principles,” Mayorkas said.

When this correspondent referred to their colleague Irving L. Gornstein’s emotional remarks at Sri’s investiture, Mayorkas was visibly moved and said, “I know he enjoys that kind of relationship with a number of people.”

“He is an extraordinarily honest, decent and heartfelt person and so his friends confide in him and he confides in them — those are the bonds that he forms in life,” he said.

Gornstein and Sri first met in 2002 at the Solicitor General’s Office and then they continued to work together when they both moved to O’Melveny & Myers.

Gornstein’s remarks, Mayorkas said, were “so beautiful. I thought, of all the speakers (*at the investiture*) — and all spoke so well — Irv moved me the most.”

Gornstein, now Executive Director of the Supreme Court Institute and a visiting professor at Georgetown Law Center, in his remarks said, “The last thing I want to tell you about is our friendship.”

“We have been friends for a good, long time and there’s nothing quite like having Sri as a friend. And I could talk about our endless discussions on how to answer a particularly hard question that we thought would come up at argument, or how we both like to dissect the way Rafael Nadal plays tennis, or how we both enjoy nothing more than a meal at Rasika or Sichuan Pavilion, or how we both like to share the trials and triumphs of our kids.”

“And I could also talk about how we both follow and admire Justice Kagan’s questioning at oral arguments, how we both marvel at the wisdom of Walter Dellinger, or how we take our cues on how to combine being a great lawyer with a great person from Don Verrilli.”

But, Gornstein said, “The story I want to tell begins with a diagnosis of a rare sarcoma, and the person diagnosed was me, and the doctors were uncertain whether the sarcoma had spread. And, of course, I told my wife first, but the second person I went to was Sri.”

“I remember going into his office, breaking down completely, as I’m about to do now, and talking for who knows how long. I don’t remember exactly what he said, but I know what he said was filled with compassion and optimism that mark his character, and I know I left that office with an unexpected calm, renewed hope, and certain knowledge that I would face the challenges ahead with my friend Sri in my corner.”

Gornstein in closing, recalled how “I was discussing Sri with a friend of mine recently and was extolling his virtues, as I so often do, and this friend of mine said to me, ‘Sri’s great, but you are biased because you love him,’ and all I could reply was, ‘Yeah, I do.’”

“So Sri, I could not be happier for you. The country could not be luckier to have you as a judge on this court, and I have only this advice to offer: Keep on being you.” ■

'Sri has a great lawyer's mind'

Elizabeth Magill met Sri Srinivasan as a fellow law clerk, but their connection goes deeper. She shares all the features that are important parts of the package that makes her friend who he is

Sri and I clerked together with Judge (*Harvie*) Wilkinson (*III*) on the Fourth Circuit in Charlottesville, Virginia, but we have a connection that's actually deeper than that: He grew up in Lawrence, Kansas, and so did my husband, and his father and my father-in-law were in the same mathematics department at the University of Kansas for 30+ years.

I didn't learn that until we were co-clerks and I got a letter from the judge saying who my co-clerk was and my husband said, "That must be Professor Srinivasan's son."

So our continued Lawrence connection is also our shared love of the Jayhawks.

We hit it off immediately when we started clerking together — it's a very small setting, just one judge and three clerks — and we worked together very well from the start. I had and have great admiration for his capacities as a lawyer. He's a very fine lawyer, and a lovely human being as well, fun to be around and just a decent, wonderful person. I have personal and professional admiration for him and that began basically as soon as we started working together, which was in the summer of 1995.

We stayed in touch over the years; I'd visit him in Washington and he'd come down to Charlottesville, where I lived. And then we were in Washington for a period at the same time when I was clerking for the Supreme Court and he was in the government. I know his family. And now I'm at Stanford and he's a Stanford Law School graduate. We've just maintained our connection in these various ways for a long time.

I think he's an incredible lawyer, thinker, and person. I've seen Sri argue in the Supreme Court a couple of times, and though I haven't seen him on the bench, I have no doubt that he's already a fine judge.

One of the times, I saw him argue a case while he was at O'Melveny & Meyers involving civil procedures in the Supreme Court, which is kind of how courts operate. A sort of basic question arose that was surprising, but hadn't been decided, and he was just the model of a great Supreme Court advocate.

I would say that has two components: One is he does what all public advocates do, which is that he makes something seem deceptively simple, something that's actually really complex; he boils it down to its essence and



ART LIEN/REUTERS

A courtroom sketch of Sri Srinivasan, then Principal Deputy Solicitor General, arguing about the constitutionality of the Defense of Marriage Act before the US Supreme Court. Elizabeth Magill admires his clear thinking and creativity in coming up with proper analogies when figuring out hard legal problems.

makes sense of the argument in this very clear way that's extremely difficult to do. And he makes it look effortless.

The second ability he has is that he's remarkably responsive to the justices, so they have concerns that are behind what they're asking the advocate and they're peppering the advocate with questions, and he knows exactly what they're asking and he gives a highly efficient and lucid answer. He exhibited those things in that argument.

I have one other example — it's not something I saw, but I listened to him arguing the Defense of Marriage Act case when he was at the Solicitor General's office. In that case he was defending a really difficult position, which is hard to explain, but it was a position where the United States Government seemed to be being inconsistent. It was refusing to defend the constitutionality of the statute, the Defense of Marriage Act while enforcing a judgment that arose out of the statute.

So the justices, who were skeptical of the government, were really attacking him on this and trying to make him

very uncomfortable, trying to make it out as if the government was being outrageous. He again had this great clarity and was very responsive, but absolutely stood his ground and had a lot of thoughtful things to say about why the government was doing what it was doing in this case. He handled it miraculously; I can't imagine anyone doing it better. It was a very tough spot to be in. He always maintains his cool.

Sri has a great lawyer's mind. He's a very clear thinker; he's very creative in coming up with proper analogies when figuring out hard legal problems. He's very understated, with a quiet confidence that I think wins him a lot of admirers in the court room.

He's extremely fair-minded — he is not a partisan and he doesn't always think whatever side he's on has no flaws. He always sees every side of an issue, which is obviously going to serve him well as a judge.

And everybody loves him. They're rooting for him to succeed because they like him so much. It's a happy story that he does so well because everybody has such great respect for him personally as well professionally. He's a deeply decent person and a great friend, kind and sincere.

When he gets to know people, he really gets to know them. He cares about others and he would always do the right thing if he were confronted with a hard question — he has that confidence about his character.

He's also just very fun to talk to: He's had interesting life experiences and reads and travels a lot; and he's also charming about his passions, like his loyalty to the Jayhawks.

He's very devoted to his family. I think these are all features of Sri that are all important parts of the package that makes him who he is.

I don't know if I've seen Sri go through any particularly large challenges because he's such a star. I'm sure he's had them, as we all have,

but he has been recognized as terrific at what he does from the start of his career, and any disappointments he has had, he hasn't lingered over. I think he spends more time focused on how happy he is in what he has been able to do.

I always thought he was going to do great things, so it didn't surprise me all that much when he was nominated (*to be a judge*) in the first instance, and it's hard to get confirmed, but even that didn't surprise me.

He's not someone who wears these kinds of things as if they are the most important aspect about him. I can't think of anyone more deserving to get recognized by the community — it couldn't happen to a greater guy.

It's a sign that good things are happening in the world when he's being recognized for his talents. ■

Elizabeth Magill is the Richard E Lang Professor of Law and Dean of the Stanford Law School.
She spoke to Chaya Babu.

‘His humility is his number one trait’

‘He is incredibly unassuming, so incredibly self-deprecating,’ neighbor and crusading lawyer Vanita Gupta, winner of the first India Abroad Publisher’s Special Award for Excellence, tells **Aziz Haniffa**

Vanita Gupta, Director of the American Civil Liberties Union’s Center for Justice, lives down the same street as Sri Srinivasan, in Arlington, Virginia. “We both knew of each other and each other’s work, but I really got to know him through Amrit’s (*Amrit Singh, senior legal officer for national security and counter-terrorism at the Open Society Justice Initiative of the Open Society Foundations*) friendship with him and got to know him better.”

“From the first day we met, we immediately struck a very good friendship. He has just been absolutely marvelous, and we became such close friends,” says Gupta, winner of the first India Abroad Publisher’s Award for Excellence 2004. “It is so wonderful to be in the company of someone who is such an authentic, brilliant person, who occupies this incredibly important position in the country.”

“For somebody who has achieved what he has achieved,” says Gupta, a trail-blazing civil rights lawyer herself, “it’s really extraordinary to see someone who is basically himself in every setting. He doesn’t have airs, doesn’t put on any airs, is modest, humble, exceedingly kind.”

“It’s incredibly extraordinary to see someone or be around someone who is the same person, regardless of whether he’s talking to a Supreme Court Justice or a random friend from his childhood,” she adds.

“I think that that is very genuine. He’s a very genuine and authentic person. I believe a lot of that has to do with his upbringing and where he grew up (*in Lawrence, Kansas*).”

“He’s a tried and true mid-Westerner,” she adds, “and his mid-Western sensibilities come out in all of his social interactions.”

“He is one of the most genuinely authentic people that I know and it’s a very attractive quality because in DC, as you know, Aziz, having covered the scene for years — you can miss that characteristic in a lot of people.”

“He’s got a really warm personality. He cares so much about family, he is so attached to his family and kids. His kids have come over to our place and they are hilarious. They are really amazing.”

Gupta has seen first hand how close he is to his sisters and his mother. “Then last year, with his father’s passing, he had so much happen in one year and you could see how much of a loss this was to him since he adored him.”

As a neighbor she has seen “Sri in action as a father. He’s so giving. His kids are the center of his universe. They are really remarkable kids and he, despite how busy he is, makes time to go to their games, their performances... they really come first for him. It’s such a lovely and endearing quality about him.”

“It’s important for South Asians, it’s important for Americans and it’s a testament to him that he got confirmed unanimously,” Gupta says. “The fact that he is a very authentic and genuine person is why people are so taken by him and everyone makes that comment when they talk about him.”



Vanita Gupta with Sri Srinivasan.

COURTESY: VANITA GUPTA

“While people admire the ascent of a career to that position, I believe what people really admire about Sri getting that position is that he is incredibly unassuming, so incredibly self-deprecating and just has a very — I am trying to think of a word that doesn’t sound trite... he’s fun, he’s easy to be around, he has no airs about him and so, he’s somebody, regardless of all his legal career, many of us would want to naturally hang out with anyway.”

“He’s a basketball player, he loves his kids, he really enjoys being around fun people, and he’s a really good friend. His humility is his number one trait.”

Even though they are neighbors, she says they don’t get together as often as they would like to, but notes, “My older kid is going to go to the same school as his kids, and it’s really nice to share this connection.”

“Of all the people, I’ve met in DC, he’s one of the folks

Chinh (*Le, her husband*) and I’d want to hang out with because we really enjoy his company. I wish our lives are not all so busy, but we try to see each other when we can.”

“When I told you earlier about where he grew up and where he comes from, which is what makes him so unassuming, so open, and so kind, I also want to tell you that as a South Asian person growing up in Kansas and a person of color, it’s really clear that he learned how to be able to get along and connect with a lot of people, while still trying to be authentic and true to what he is.”

“He had some hard times in the course of that, but I think that’s the kind of upbringing he had. But, of course, his reaction to that was to be able to figure out what connected him to all kinds of different people who were different to him, while still being true to himself — that’s something that really speaks out about him.” ■